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AUTHOR Worthington, Elliot R.
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ABSTRACT

Behavioral scientists working with military and veteran populations are able to symptomatically describe the adjustment problems exhibited by these individuals. There is some dispute, however, as to the cause of the maladaptive behaviors and why they occur in some people and not others who shared the same or similar military experiences. This paper presents evidence that suggests that adjustment problems are more related to pre-service maladaptive behaviors than to military experiences. Several investigative research projects by the author support this concept that there is a strong relationship between pre-service maladaptive behaviors, in-service adaptive problems, and post-service adjustment. Biographic and demographic data gathered on successful and unsuccessful soldiers and veterans were examined. Analysis of the variables indicated that those soldiers and veterans who experienced educational, vocational, or social adjustment problems were the same individuals who reported adjustment difficulties during their service tours and also prior to entering active duty. The data available to date seems to support the theory that adjustment problems are more related to pre-service maladaptive behavior patterns than military experiences. (Author)

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ADJUSTMENT BEHAVIORS, PRIOR TO, DURING, AND AFTER ARMY SERVICE

Elliott Robert Worthington, Ph.D.

Major MSC

Psychology Consultant

U.S. Army Health Services Command

Fort Sam Houston, Texas 78234

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ADJUSTMENT BEHAVIORS, PRIOR TO, DURING, AND AFTER ARMY SERVICE

Four years ago the United States terminated active participation in the Vietnam conflict, the longest war in our history. This complex struggle in Southeast Asia had been fraught with economic, cultural, political, educational, and social problems unprecedented in our history. The consequences of this controversial war are still being argued by social and behavioral scientists and the plight of the Vietnam era veteran is still receiving considerable attention. As recently as three years ago, very little scientific investigation had been conducted regarding the readjustment process of veterans. Prior to 1973 the information that had been published was primarily descriptive and anecdotal. The popular media had depicted the Vietnam veteran as suffering from a variety of reentry adjustment problems ranging from mild to serious. Since this time the veteran has been scrutinized by the scientific community, inquiring into his post-service adjustment. A wealth of data seems to refute the common conception that maladjustment experienced by veterans is related to military and/or combat experiences; however, we have still not satisfactorily answered the possibility of a post-separation stress reaction.

While abnormal, maladaptive behaviors of Vietnam era veterans have been documented (cf. Shatan, 1971, 1972, 1973; Braun, 1974; Levy, 1974; Polner, 1974; Robins, 1974; Egendorf, 1975; Horowitz & Solomon, 1975; Strayer, 1975; Nace, Meyers, O'Brien, Ream & Mintz, 1976), the conclusions that these behaviors are a consequence of military training or experience is not a proven fact. Other behavioral scientists (cf. Enzie, Sawyer & Montgomery, 1973; Robins, 1973, 1974; Starr, 1973; Worthington, 1973, 1975, 1976b; Hassener & McCary, 1974; Stenger, 1974; Borus, 1975) do not find evidence to support a theory of direct relationships between all post-service adjustment problems and military service.

The author has conducted several research projects (Worthington, 1973, 1975, 1976a, 1976b) examining various adjustment behaviors of Vietnam era Army veterans and active duty Army personnel. Two main areas of inquiry were investigated: first, the prevalence of abnormal, maladaptive behavior patterns; and second, causes of one's inability to adapt, either

from civilian to military life or the return to civilian life. This paper will attempt to show that post-service adjustment problems are more related to a lifestyle of inappropriate and unsuccessful coping behaviors than to any specific military related experiences.

There is evidence (cf. Robins, 1974; Stenger, 1974; Borus, 1975; Helzner, Robins & Davis, 1975/76; Worthington, 1975) to suggest that the veterans' maladaptive behavior is a reflection of their inability to cope with the stress and strain life places upon them in an unending variety of ways. This paper will review research which supports this theory and present data which indicates that those soldiers who experienced post-service adjustment problems also found difficulty in coping during their Army service. Additionally, it will be shown that those soldiers who could not adjust during the initial phases of Army training generally presented pre-service histories of maladaptive behaviors. The contention of this investigator is that adjustment problems (either during Army service or in the post-Army civilian environment) are more related to early dispositions (i.e., learning, experience, developmental, hereditary, etc.) than to military service.

Behavioral scientists who assert that wide spread post-service maladaptive behaviors on the part of Vietnam era veterans do exist, feel these behaviors are related to military training and experiences. Shatan (1971) explained that "good Americans" were turned into "mass executioners" as a result of modern combat training. The outcome, Shatan (1972) believes, is an unconsumated grief of soldiers which deprives them of any meaning in their current existence. He labels this, Post-Vietnam Syndrome. These symptoms do not occur immediately, but nine to thirty months elapse before the veterans begin to change (Shatan, 1973). These changes include: apathy, cynicism, alienation, depression, mistrust, insomnia, restlessness, and impatience. Although Shatan admits he has no scientific studies to support his belief, he maintains that "impressive evidence suggests that thousands of combat veterans experience severe psychic suffering and tens of thousands <u>may</u> experience milder suffering that is never recognized."

Horowitz and Solomon (1975) report that the delayed stress response

often begins after termination of the real environmental stresses, and after a latency period has passed. This unresolved stress leads to violent impulses and feelings of shame and guilt. In concurrence with Dr. Shatan, a theory of pathology is assumed in the absence of scientific inquiry. These assertions, Horowitz and Soloman agree, must be regarded as preliminary and speculative.

Egendorf (1975) and Lifton (1973,1975) reported ongoing therapeutic rap sessions with veterans who talked about feelings of guilt, pain, and torment. Lifton (1975) stated that these feelings are a reflection of the veteran survivors; reacting to the inhumane actions of the Vietnam War. Lifton (1973) said that his data are not representative; he explored certain feelings and images of combat veterans who shared his anti-war feelings.

As cited earlier, there is evidence to show that Vietnam era veterans are experiencing difficulty in their post-military role as civilians. What is not evident though, is why. Jonathan Braun (1974) has described the situation as "...thousands who have been locked into lives of hardship, disappointment and despair after serving in Vietnam." Strayer and Ellenhorn (1975) conducted a study of 40 Vietnam veterans. The investigators concluded that the veterans' post-service adjustment processes were unusually complex and difficult. The veterans felt that overall adjustment in civilian life was related to the extent and intensity of their combat involvement.

Other studies tend to support these findings. A study conducted in New England (O'Neill & Fontaine, 1973) revealed that 70% of a random sample of veterans in various colleges reported experiencing difficulty adjusting to civilian life. The Veterans Administration has conducted extensive research regarding the Vietnam era veteran and readjustment. Charles Stenger (1974), a senior VA psychologist, stated that there was reason to believe that the readjustment process was more difficult for Vietnam era veterans than their predecessors. He felt that special readjustment problems faced by the returning Vietnam veterans were added to the adjustment problems they already shared with non-Vietnam veteran peers. Dr. Stenger feels that while it is theoretically possible that

some veterans may exhibit all of the post-Vietnam syndrome, the VA mental health professionals have not found this to be the case. He feels there is more evidence of character and behavior disorders which reflect a cultural tolerance of acting-out behaviors.

Other studies, though, do not support the concept of a post-Vietnam syndrome. A comparative study of veterans and non-veterans in a western university (Hassemer & McCary, 1974) revealed that veteran students viewed their military tours as favorable and helpful toward success in college. The veteran students reported satisfying relationships with fellow students and being well accepted on campus. The investigators also found that the veteran students experienced difficult times regarding social adjustments because they were older and had encountered more unique life experiences. Another study in the Midwest (Enzie, Sawyer & Montgomery, 1973) examined the manifest anxiety level of recently returned Vietnam combat veterans in comparison to a random sample of male undergraduate students. The study revealed that the veteran sample did not have higher levels of anxiety than did the undergraduate sample.

Dr. J. F. Borus (1974), a Harvard psychiatrist, felt that reports of post-service civilian maladjustment were not the results of scientifically controlled studies. His own investigations suggested that only a small minority had some record of maladjustment. His contention was that some of the later readjustment problems might be more related to ongoing problems than to military service. In a military study, Borus (1975) reported findings of a sizeable number of Vietnam veterans who had difficulty readjusting to the stateside military. He emphatically pointed out that a generalization of this to all Vietnam veterans was false.

Paul Starr (1973), an investigative reporter for Ralph Nader's Center for Study of Responsive Law, reached the following conclusions regarding the "Post-Vietnam Syndrome." There is no significant evidence indicating widespread violence among veterans and there is no significant evidence that violence among veterans is more frequent than violence among young working-class males. While agreeing that some veterans do

encounter disorientation, anger, resentment, rage, and bewilderment; he states that there are no studies to indicate how widespread there behaviors might be.

The controversy regarding causes of veteran readjustment problems was the basis for an investigation by the author (Worthington, 1973, 1976b) to examine the reported feelings of Army veterans who had returned to civilian life. The sample consisted of 147 male veterans, who had been examined within twelve months of their release from active duty. This sample represented 75 percent of the total population available for the study; or 90.7 percent of those veterans contacted.

Six dependent measures were selected as a means to assess the reported feelings of the veterans. Four of these measures were taken from the Elmore Scale of Anomie (1965). The fifth measure was the Total Positive Score of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (Fitts, 1964) and the sixth measure was the Socialization Scale of the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1956).

The study indicated that there was no strong relationship between service in Vietnam and difficult civilian readjustment. This finding, like others previously reported, raised serious questions concerning the validity of widely established views on Vietnam veterans and post-service adjustment problems.

During the above study much demographic data was collected but not processed as part of the original study. The purpose of this second inquiry (Worthington, 1975) was to examine these demographic factors and determine if any possible relationships to post-service adjustment existed. The 147 veterans completed a 28 item, 136 response demographic questionnaire. An ANOVA computer program was used to determine if significant differences could be determined between responses to the demographic items and the indicators of adjustment (i.e., Elmore Scale of Anomie, Socialization Scale of the CPI, and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale). This analysis of the data was used to determine if any response to an item in the demographic questionnaire would be significantly different from the other responses. If so, then that response and the item could be indicative of a factor relating to post-service adjustment. Eleven

of the items were identified as being related to adjustment differences.

These eleven items, seen as factors related to post-service adjustment, were: (1) post-service marital status, (2) post-service religious status, (3) post-service educational level, (4) post-service occupation, (5) type of service (i.e., EM, officer, RA, USAR), (6) rank upon discharge, (7) disciplinary record during service, (8) status prior to service, (9) age upon entering service, (10) legal/school authority problems, and (11) time away from home prior to service. Generally, it appeared that a relationship existed between high adjustment scores and post-service marriage and professional occupational status while a relationship also existed between low adjustment scores and marital problems, no religious affiliation, being high school drop-outs, and being unemployed. It seemed that low post-service adjustment scores were related to those veterans who served as enlisted men and were not promoted or were demoted during their service tour and those veterans who received some type of disciplinary action while in the Army. There was also evidence that high post-service adjustment scores were related to having been older, having been in school, not having had any problems with authorities, and having spent time away from home prior to Army service.

These findings indicate that post-service adjustment problems could be attributed to social, educational, or vocational problems not connected with military service. They also suggest that those veterans who might be experiencing post-service adjustment problems could be the same soldiers who also had adjustment problems during military service. The study tends to support conclusions that problems in the veterans' current lives might be more closely related to maladaptive behavior patterns than to military service.

There is sufficient data to support the theory that relationships do exist between pre-service behaviors of military personnel and their manner of performance and adjustment during military service. These studies indicate that military adjustment and associated problems are directly related to the individuals' pre-service behavior patterns. The US Navy has conducted several studies examining relationships between future performance and biographic/demographic data. Gunderson and Arthur

(1966) reported that relationships were found between incidence of mental illness of male Naval enlisted personnel and demographic factors such as age, length of service, rank, and occupational specialty. Plag and Goffman (1966) found that three variables--age, level of schooling, and general intelligence--were significantly related to military effectiveness in the Navy. Arthur (1971) stated that success was predictable; pre-service variables of age, educational level, intelligence, school and civil disciplinary record, and home stability became predictable effectiveness criteria. Naval research with drug abusers (Plag & Goffman, 1973; Nail & Gunderson, 1975) substantiated the above findings.

A behavioral profile for predicting "problem" soldiers was created in an Army Airborne Division (Timmerman, 1974). A study was conducted to collect and analyze variables of personality, background, and intelligence on both a "problem soldier" and "nonproblem soldier" sample. The conclusions were that twelve variables of adjustment, background, and intelligence had a relatively high degree of predictive ability. These variables were used to identify the soldier who would have disciplinary problems after entering a combat unit.

The author was recently assigned to a large Army training post where a study was designed to investigate if any relationships existed between pre-service behaviors and inability to adjust to military training (Worthington, 1976). The project was to assemble biographic/demographic data on those soldiers that mental health personnel considered unsuitable for retention and therefore recommended for an administrative discharge based on inability to adapt to the military training environment. This group was seen as the unsuccessful soldiers. The successful group was comprised of soldiers who were in the final days of basic or advanced training and similar biographic/demographic information was collected. Analysis of the data of the two groups provided background variables which would discriminate between the successful and unsuccessful groups.

The data on the unsuccessful soldiers was collected from 75 trainees, seen between May and August 1975, and recommended for immediate discharge from active duty. The data on the successful soldiers was collected from a sample of 1489 soldiers, questioned in the next to last week of training, during the months of July through November 1975. The results

indicated that while not appreciably older, the unsuccessful soldier group had less education, a higher school drop-out rate, fewer single males, and a higher percentage of divorces and multiple marriages. The mental health professionals' reasons for recommending discharges revealed that immaturity was a constant factor not differentially effected by length of training. Impaired intellectual functioning and phobic reactions were quickly identified and dealt with. Anxiety and stress was an important disqualifying factor initially but quickly diminished. Character behavior disorders remained hidden longer. Marital problems were seen as more serious by the trainee in the early phases of training but became more legitimate for discharge purposes during the latter stages of training. Perhaps the most intriguing bit of information was the fact that 19% of the trainees indicated a pre-service psychiatric history. The mean complaint time for both basic and advanced training fell at the end of the second week of training.

Family background information might be considered the most important. It revealed a significant amount of disruptive family events which, while not tested, would probably exceed normal occurrences in either the total Army enlistee population or that of 19 year old American males as a whole. Almost two thirds (61%) of the unsuccessful group were without one or both parents. They came from fairly large families (with 3.7 siblings each). When they terminated their schooling in the tenth grade, they were a year older than their classmates. A high incidence (43%) of familial psychiatric treatment was also noted.

The implications of this investigation indicated that pre-service coping patterns do not change upon enlistment in the Army. Those soldiers with a history of poor adjusting skills become maladjusted soldiers, unable to adapt and successfully survive in the military training environment. The background of both the unsuccessful soldier and his family was highly indicative of very poor adjusting or coping resources. Families failed, marriages broke down, schooling was seen as nonproductive and terminated early; life prior to entrance in the Army was seen as unsuccessful. Life after entrance on active military duty was no better; failure occurred again.

These findings are not inconsistent with research currently being conducted with Vietnam era veterans and drug and alcohol abuse. Goodwin, Davis, and Robins (1975) studied drinking patterns and problems of 451 Army enlisted men after their return from Vietnam. Four pre-service predictors of alcohol abuse were noted: early age of drinking, school troubles, educational level, and a father with a history of alcohol abuse. A study of narcotic use and addiction was conducted with 898 Vietnam veterans (Helzer, Robins & Davis, 1975/76). The authors feel their study confirms the importance of a history of deviant behavior in predicting a willingness to try narcotics and a propensity to increase the involvement. Dr. Lee Robins (1974) in an examination of veterans' drug use three years after Vietnam, stated that the strongest predictor of post-Vietnam arrests, depression, unemployment, and divorce was a history of drug usage both during and before Vietnam. O'Brien, Nace, Meyers, and Mintz (1976) in a study of alcohol and drug abuse in the Vietnam veteran found that post-discharge criminality, alcohol, and drug abuse, and depression are accounted for by pre-service experiences as well as addiction status while in Vietnam.

SUMMARY

The scope of this paper has been to review much of the research regarding Vietnam era veterans and their post-service adjustment to the civilian world. Most researchers agree that the veteran of this period has encountered difficulty; the disagreement centers on the extent of the difficulty, and more precisely, the cause. Those proponents of an extensive psychopathological undercurrent, due to erupt in the near or distant future, offer little more than isolated studies, experiences or personal subjective feelings to support theories of a delayed stress response.

Those who oppose these theories offer the fact that there is no evidence to support this contention. Others offer firm evidence of strong relationships between post-service adjustment, in-service adaptive problems, and pre-service maladaptive behaviors. Some investigators have pointed out that many events which occurred in the United States adversely

effected the readjustment processes of the veterans (i.e., a nationwide feeling of anti-war sentiment, economic instability, high unemployment rates, a period of national unrest due to race riots, college riots, etc.). These conditions did not assist a returning veteran. After risking his life for a year, the veteran returned to a country of discontent, which showed little regard for the deprivation and suffering he endured.

It will be years before social scientists can examine the Vietnam era veteran from an uncontaminated vantage point. Until then we will have to proceed in light of the data and evidence currently available. It is the contention of this researcher that there is insufficient evidence to support the concept of a massive "delayed stress syndrome." The data available to date seems to support the theory that adjustment problems are more related to previous maladaptive behaviors than military experiences.

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